

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /068 W

-----044242 151323Z /66

P R 151305Z JUL 78

FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1657

INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY QUITO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

DIA WASHDC

USCINSCO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 5592

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BL

SUBJECT: GOB CLOSES ALL BOLIVIAN UNIVERSITIES

REF: LA PAZ 4273

1. SUMMARY: ON JULY 11 THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION ORDERED THE CLOSURE OF ALL BOLIVIAN UNIVERSITIES UNTIL AUGUST 14. THE MOVE WAS APPARENTLY TAKEN BECAUSE OF GOB CONCERN THAT THE UNIVERSITIES, WHERE SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION POLITICAL LEADER HERNAN SILES ZUAZO IS STRONG, MIGHT BECOME A CENTER OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT AGITATION. END SUMMARY.

2. ON JULY 12 THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION (CNES) ANNOUNCED THE CLOSURE OF ALL BOLIVIAN UNIVERSITIES EFFECTIVE JULY 11 UNTIL AUGUST 14 BECAUSE OF WORK STOPPAGES AND OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE IN UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS. AT THE SAME TIME THE CNES FIRED LA PAZ UNIVERSITY RECTOR DR HUGO MANSILLA, WHO HAD BEEN APPOINTED RECTOR ON MAY 29 (REFTEL). MANSILLA WAS FIRED OBSTENSIBLY FOR CONVENING A MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL WITHOUT CNES PERMISSION, BUT MORE LIKELY HIS DISMISSAL RESULTED
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FROM HIS RESISTANCE TO THE CNES DECISION TO CLOSE THE UNIVERSITY.

3. THERE HAVE BEEN NO INDICATIONS OF ANY DISTURBANCES INVOLVED IN THE CLOSURE OF ANY OF THE UNIVERSITIES. THE NUMBER OF POLICE, WHO OCCUPIED THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN ANDRES IN LA PAZ ON JULY 11, HAS DECLINED STEADILY AND ONLY A FEW ARE NOW PRESENT IN FRONT OF THE MAIN ENTRANCE. WHILE MOST OF THE UNIVERSITIES IN

THE COUNTRY HAVE APPARENTLY COMPLIED WITH THE CNES ORDER, A FEW REMAIN OPEN. THE RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF POTOSI, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, HAS KEPT HIS UNIVERSITY OPEN AND IS TRYING TO GARNER THE SUPPORT OF THE OTHER RECTORS FOR A REVOCATION OF THE CNES ORDER. AND IN COCHABAMBA, ONE UNIVERSITY REMAINS OPEN AND HAS REQUESTED PERMISSION TO CONTINUE OPERATING FOR AN ADDITIONAL 20 DAYS TO COMPLETE FINAL EXAMS.

4. COMMENT: THE REASON GIVEN BY THE CNES FOR CLOSING THE UNIVERSITIES APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN, AT LEAST IN PART, TRUMPED UP. THE WORK STOPPAGES HAVE NOT BEEN THAT IMPORTANT. INSTEAD, THE CNES DECISION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MOTIVATED BY GOOB CONCERN THAT, GIVEN THE TENSE SITUATION EXISTING THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY FOLLOWING THE JULY 9 ELECTIONS, THE UNIVERSITIES MIGHT BECOME A CENTER OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT AGITATION. THE UNIVERSITIES HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN BOLIVIAN POLITICS IN THE PAST AND THE ADMINISTRATION APPARENTLY FEARED THAT HERNAN SILES, WHO COMMANDS CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY WITHIN THE BOLIVIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY, MIGHT TRY TO CAPITALIZE ON HIS UNIVERSITY SUPPORT TO PROTEST THE ELECTION FRAUD.
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